Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

SUMMER 2004

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PALM DESERT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
50th Anniversary
(compiled by V. Folkers, Curator)

The oldest documents in the Society's archives about the Palm Desert Booster's Association, the precursor of the Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce, are dated 1953. A February meeting at the Palm Desert Community Church featured a speaker's topic as "Individual Responsibility to the Community."

At a meeting on December 9 the association announced a permanent slate of officers and a board of directors. Officers included Col. "Bob" Ellsworth, Eloise B. Gates, Robert Coates, Helen Gabell and Hugh Fletcher. Also on the board were Mickey Delaney, James Harstad, George Merrill Roy, Richard Marsh, Robert Sturgeon, and Tom Brown. Interim standing and special committees were also named, several of which were already functioning. It was voted not to incorporate as a Chamber of Commerce at this time, but to carry on such chamber activities as fit the needs of a rapidly growing Palm Desert.

Later, during the Christmas holidays in 1953, PDBA wined and dined twenty-three women Travellarians in queenly style at the Shadow Mountain Club's 6th annual ball. The next morning they joined the hay ride from Shadow Mountain Stables to Jack Boyer's chuck wagon breakfast at Desert Air Park. An area tour included a visit to the Desert Magazine Art Gallery. Before leaving for home, the ladies were guests of Hank Gogerty for a buffet dinner at Desert Air Hotel. This group represented every branch of the travel industry from the Los Angeles area. Members of PDBA were working hard to attract tourists to Palm Desert right from the beginning.

A June 1954 report of the Publicity Committee emphasized the major push they were executing to make Palm Desert known as a tourist destination. The Highway 111 Association was formed for the purpose of directing tourist traffic and trade along Highway 111 by erecting directional signs at strategic points. This document includes the following paragraph:

"Looking to the future and next season under our new charter, now being prepared to incorporate as a Chamber of Commerce, provision is being made for a manager. At the outset this position will be filled by a volunteer, as we progress our by-laws will be flexible so we can make this a part-time paid worker and hope that our progress in Palm Desert will be so rapid that eventually a top manager will be found necessary. Another good piece of work now under way, and expected to be accomplished by the opening of the coming season, is negotiations now in process to have a highway-located office for your Chamber at little or no cost to your organization."

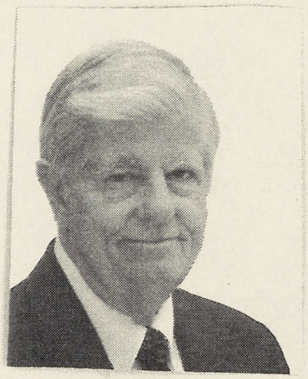
The Chamber of Commerce was incorporated on December 23, 1954 with lots of interested business people to get it off to a good start. They established an annual Fun Fair on the Fourth of July at Shadow Mountain Club with a fireworks display, boxed chicken dinners, a water show, game booths and dancing under the stars. They opened a new office in the Welcome-Oasis building with an open house.

In 1956 they published a shopping directory and also one for accommodations. At that time there were 30 hotels and motels in Palm Desert. That same year they formed a committee to cooperate with the Coachella Valley Industrial Committee on their request for desirable industry compatible with the type of economy and resort business already established. They worked with the telephone companies to get direct service to Palm Springs from the Palm Desert exchange. They contributed $180 per year toward rent of the Library in the Patio Shops. A zoning plan was established with the county. A sanitary district and a dump site were additional projects.

Chamber of Commerce (continued):
Tennis and polo tournaments were encouraged. Business members paid $24 per year, and homeowners who were interested in the welfare of the community were invited to join forces with the Chamber.

In April of 1957 two television programs, one in black and white and the other in color, on Channel 4 featured Palm Desert. This generated over 200 inquiries requesting more information. The publication of a newsletter *Palm Desert Patter - from the "smartest address on the American desert"* began – P.O. Box 12 – Phone 76-5264. In the second issue it was noted: Recently a woman called and asked if Palm Desert had a cemetery. Jeannette Constantino's sparkling reply was, "Sorry, Miss, people don't die here!"

We could go on and on....it's all history! But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and all we have to do is look at our Chamber of Commerce today. The men and women who have invested themselves over the years join forces with the leaders and members of today. A large part of what Palm Desert is now and will become in the future can be credited to these industrious people. Happy 50th Anniversary, Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce!!



DR. S. ROY WILSON HONORED *** 23RD ANNUAL FOUNDER'S DAY CEREMONY

Co-chaired by Dan Callahan and Joyce White this event was held in the City Hall council chamber. The food tables in the vestibule were decorated in palm branches and green and white balloons. Posters on the patio pictured Dr. Wilson at all stages of life. These decorations were executed by Jan Holmlund and Bonnie Bowie. The lead man in charge of an elegant array of foods was Kent Smith, with his able assistant and mom, Helene Harrison. Anne Tuttle, Jean Hollenbeck, and Jean Ernst also lent a helping hand.

Pres. Hal Rover welcomed 200 citizens, introduced VIPs and past Founder's Day recipients, and gave a short history of Palm Desert. Dan Callahan explained that this year **PALM AWARDS** would also be given to two people who merited the attention and thanks of the community.

Nelda Esmeralda, principal of Lincoln School, presented a Palm Award to
Winton Znerold (absent) for volunteer tutoring of school children.
Dr. Maria Sheehan, Supt./Pres. of College of the Desert, presented a Palm Award to
Dr. Rick Post for outstanding work in getting a bond issue passed.

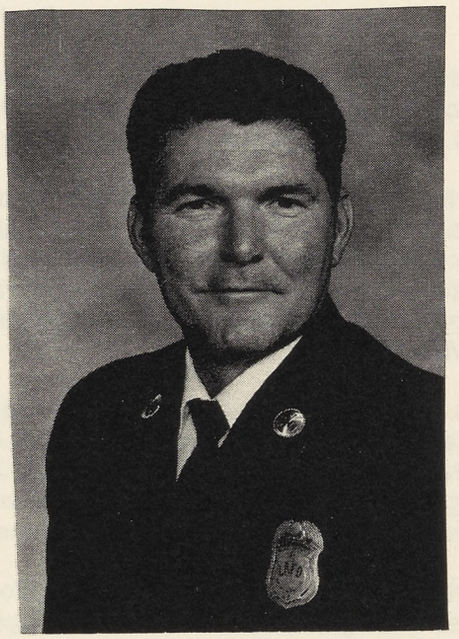
Scott Wilson, Harold Bird, Jean Benson, and Larry Parrish contributed a string of adjectives about Roy Wilson, including: loves his work, good steward of taxpayers' money, makes a difference, easy to work with, patient, funny, thorough, determined to get what he wants, walks gently but carries a big stick. Roy was a Professor of Media Communication & Journalism at C.O.D., served on the Palm Desert City Council, and is presently the County Supervisor for the 4th District. After receiving the Founder's Day award, Roy thanked everyone for attending -- including his 92-year-old father.

SPRING LUNCHEON with PAT LAFLIN
April 28th at Desert Falls Country Club

The Society wishes to thank Jean Hollenbeck for chairing this event, and Anne Tuttle for organizing the raffle and helping with the many details that make for a successful affair. President Hal Rover announced Founder's Day and the Fall Yard Sale plans. Also he mentioned the Society's new program for 2nd graders. Dick Folkers gave a membership report. Joyce White mentioned the election of new officers and board, and the status of the blueprint project. Lois Bradstreet talked about the **Plaque of Appreciation** which was awarded to **Tony Dalugdug of Home Town Buffet** for his generous donation of cookies for many of the Society's events

Pat Laflin, pioneer, history author, retired school teacher, wife of Ben, mother of five children and grandmother of 12, gave a delightful talk about many of the interesting details and human interest aspects of local history. Pat is the author of "Coachella Valley California – A Pictorial History" published in 1998. She said that geography had a lot to do with why people came to the valley. Ben Laflin came in 1912 with three of his UC-Berkley friends. They claimed a homestead and began raising dates and grapes. Ben was the only one who stayed and farmed, and he finally sold his place near the railroad depot for $22,000 in 1962. Pat talked about that crucial element: water; and about life in the early, formative days of the Coachella Valley in general and of Palm Desert in particular.

JAMES "JIM" W. YOUNG



Jim was born April 1, 1935 to Garland and Katherine Young. It was from his grandfather's farm house in Homer, Kentucky that he first viewed the world. The 50-acre parcel is still in the family but the house is long gone. Moves took the family of five to San Joaquin Valley, Long Beach, and Venice, CA. Jim's father worked in the aircraft industry 30 years, and his mother worked in retail for 33 years.

Education consisted of : Venice High School in 1953, AA Degree from L.A. City College in 1955, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, UCLA extension courses, and Santa Monica City College for Fire Science classes. Starting from elementary school, Jim has had many occupations including: paper boy, welder, print shop, state hospital worker, heating/AC, and aircraft. In the Army he was a motor pool mechanic with his own tank in Germany. Then he was a Coca Cola sales/driver.

On Sept. 1, 1962 he began 38 years as a member of the L.A. City Fire Department, work he absolutely loved. Promotions included: Apparatus Operator 1968, Captain 1968, Captain II 1975, Battalion Chief 1978, and Assistant Chief 1986. After retiring on July 3, 2000, he moved to Palm Desert the following month.

Jim married in 1962, had four children, and lost his wife after 34 years. Then Kay McCune came on the scene. She had been a high school friend, and 45 years later they went out on their first date. The movie "Grease" was made at Venice High School, which came close to telling the story of the Winter 1953 class. Jim says, "We had some fantastic looking women." They recently attended their 50th Class Reunion.

Married on April 29, 1999, Jim & Kay make their home in a unique piece of Palm Desert's history. It was Randall Henderson's first home here, built in 1949 and located on Larrea Street. Randall was the editor of Desert Magazine and built the first large commercial building in Palm Desert. The Youngs have done some work on the house, and taking into consideration Kay's knack for interior design, it is indeed a Spanish-style showcase.

A very active person, Jim likes to bike, hike, travel, go to the gym, play racquet ball, walk his dog, compute, read three newspapers and non-fiction, putter around the house, take orders from Kay, visit with friends and family, baby sit grandchildren, and take rides in his Corvette with the top down. Jim was a board member of the Society, is a member of the Living Desert and of the Chief Officers Association – Los Angeles City Fire Department.

Biographical footnote: **Jim and Elvis (or) "Fifteen Minutes of Fame"**

In 1958 the Russians and United States were playing chicken along what was considered the armored invasion route from East Germany to the West. Jim Young and a large number of other men were drafted and sent to Fort Hood, Texas. Elvis Presley was on the list of draftees. In Germany, while in the field during war game training Jim met Elvis, and was invited to the star's off-base house on Sundays to play touch football. In Jim's words, "The guy you saw in the movies was Elvis, he wasn't acting. He was a real down-to-earth guy, but its obvious things must have changed. We would play football in a local park in front of 200 to 500 screaming women who surrounded the field. Then we went back to Elvis' place. He would tell stories on himself, play the piano, sing, and we all drank cokes and smoked the wood-tipped 'Tiprillo' cigars provided by Elvis, his only vice that I ever observed."

VOLUNTEERS / DOCENTS REPORT

At the last docent training meeting Art Montoya gave an interesting talk about the early history of Palm Desert and about his work here as the postmaster. Since then, Art has loaned the Society a couple of scrapbooks which will provide great historical copy for future newsletters. Also, see the following CVWD tour article by Brett Romer.

If you would like to volunteer for a variety of tasks that need to be done at the historical fire house, please call and put your name on the list – being a docent isn't your only option. Chairperson Jean Ernst has tentatively scheduled the next volunteer meeting for Sept. 26 at 3:00 p.m. – mark your calendar.

COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT TOUR, 4-22-04

by Brett Romer (edited by V. Folkers, Curator)

With an outstanding guide and a comfortable bus our tour started out early Thursday morning from the CVWD office in Thermal. Society members joined others to fill a bus for the day-long trip. Imperial Valley Museum was our first stop. We stayed only for a few minutes, just long enough to whet our appetites for a return visit.

At the next stop we saw a portion of the unlined All American Canal being diverted into the concrete lined Coachella Valley Canal. We were also able to view the abandoned Coachella Canal from this location. Several electric generators were operating at the dam. Further on we stopped across the river from Yuma, where California, Arizona and Mexico meet. This is where the Alamo Canal, the Colorado River, and the All American Canal come within a short distance of each other; and where the latter makes a sharp turn to the west and follows the US/Mexico border.

We were served a delicious lunch at the Imperial Dam stop. One of the dam's most interesting features was a "strainer" used to keep large objects out of the canal with a specialized device used to clean the strainer. There were also four large settling ponds used to remove silt from the water. Next we headed for Glamis, noted as the place to go dune-buggying. Though the wind was blowing fairly hard and the sand was moving, the dunes were a beautiful sight to see.

Agriculture was highlighted at the last stop, where we visited some farms in the Mecca area. The canal water is piped underground to individual 40-acre plots where it is metered off into holding ponds. From there it goes to drip irrigation systems which also add fertilizers – thus the plants are both watered and nourished. The entire system is set up so that there is minimal waste of the water. It is controlled at the district office as well as at the local farm office. This compares to the flood-type irrigation used in the Imperial Valley, resulting in a significant amount of waste water run-off at the end of the process.

Since we all know that a picture is worth a thousand words; please feel free to come and see photographs of the trip at the Society office. Maybe you'll be lucky enough to see Brett, who can give you a running commentary.

SCHOOL PROGRAM

Adele Ruxton designed this program for second grade learning requirements, which are: fire and police, people who make a difference, and long ago vs. now. This is how it works: A bus load of students is ushered into the Founder's Room where Pres. Hal Rover talks about early Palm Desert and the pioneer brothers: Cliff, Randall, Phil and Carl. A 5-minute film by Ted Lennon is viewed. In the main exhibit room the children hear about Hopalong Cassidy, Shadow Mt. Club, and see aerial photos. In the central bay "Fireman Bob" Green explains early firefighting equipment and methods. The Society pays for Cardiff and Desert Sands bus transportation.

Beginning April 20 and ending May 24, (21) classes of 20 students each will have participated. The Society wishes to thank the following schools and teachers:

Washington Charter
Diane Langius, Brenda Toms, Julianne Elliott, Kay Wheaton, Lisa Mascho, Diane Marcks

Sacred Heart
Mona Murray, Loretta McGowan

Abraham Lincoln
Carol Wiener, Judy Grenier, Maria Gillentine, Craig Christensen, Melanie Larsen, S. Mendoza

James Carter
Cathy Brag, Lynda Cordova, Gayle Jacobsen, Kathy Cox, Terri Gonzalez, Marla Faulk, Elaine Hill

"School Tours" is a team effort !!

Sincere thanks to Anne Tuttle and all the giving docents. Heartiest thanks to Chief Bob Green....always present in period dress. Kids turn on to this most charitable retired firefighter.

Hal Rover

DONATIONS

Cindy Calquhoun – General Manager of Shadow Mountain Resort & Club = Blazer crest for Shadow Mountain C.C.
Patty Coffin = (6) 8 x 10 photos, Coffin family and Palm Desert history
Michael Kirkpatrick = 1877 framed Railroad Spike
Elsie Spreadbury via David & Dorothy Main = the first issue of Sun Spots with the envelope post-dated 7-16-47, the first day in operation of the original Palm Desert post office
Jean Hanousek Martin – a cookbook, "Firehouse Chef" by Keith Young
Millie Bird = a child's pop-up book, "Firefighters"
Allen Valley = State Board of Equalization license for Palm Desert Corporation dated 1-13-53
Pearl Hoyt = 52 color photos of Palm Desert, August 1984
Helen Dengler, author and desert pioneer = book "White Sun – Volume 2"
Duchess Emerson, niece of the Henderson brothers, via Bus Lesser = 2 CDs of Western Poetry & Stories by Emmett Finch
Bud Lesser = autobiographical text and pictures
Lillian Phillips = 39 celebrity autographs (soon to be exhibited by Jan Holmlund)
Art Montoya = subsequent to his speaking at a Docent Meeting about his work as Postmaster of Palm Desert, Art loaned the Society two scrapbooks from which we garnered 37 articles and autobiographies.

DECEASED MEMBERS – They Live in Our Memory

Dr. Edgar De Forest
Retired from the College of the Desert in 1978 where he was a professor.
He continued to be an active poet and actor during the past 23 years.
He is quoted: "I have had an amazingly satisfying life."

Diven Meredith
A Mechanical Engineer holding two patents.
Founder of Meredith Brothers in Thermal, and later Meredith & Simpson in Indio.
Served in the Navy during W. W. II. Was president of Shadow Mt. C. C. 1983-1985.

Frankie Abel
A journalist and self-employed real estate broker.
Active with the Palm Desert Women's Club – past president.

NEW MEMBERS

Business: College of the Desert Alumni Association

Contributing: Lothar & Marji Vashotz

Supporting: Nancy Waller Thomas
Robert & Lynn Lucurell

Family: George & Carol Fanelli
David & Margaret Firestone
Laurie Nadeau
Richard & Helen Nederhauser
John & Lynette Wohlmuth
Chuck Weisbart
Sgt. Major & Mrs. Ray Schum

Individual: James Eggers
Anita Ratchinsky
Homer Croy
Julia Verhagen
Shirley Stueve
Jeff Patterson

MEMBERSHIP

John Marman and Dick Folkers, committee co-chairs, ask that you invite friends, relatives and business owners to join the Society. They can't reach their goal of 100 new members in 2004 unless you participate. You can pick up some of our new tri-fold brochures at the office.

ED MULLINS MEMORIAL PICNIC

Members and guests numbered 144 at our annual picnic. Many thanks to Keedy burger chefs & servers: Barbara Keedy Eastes, Doug Keedy, Sandy Keedy and Jonathan Keedy. Raffle gifts were donated by: Joslyn Cove Senior Center, P.S. Follies, C.V. Museum, San Diego Art Museum, The Nest Restaurant, Taquila Club Restaurant, Golf Resort of Indian Wells, Living Desert, Visitor Center, COD Bookstore, Desert Willow Golf Resort, Adele Ruxton-California Desert Chorale, J.C. Penney Salon.

FALL YARD SALE – October 30 & 31 (Sat. & Sun.)

The Society's annual Fire House Yard Sale activities have already begun with the collection of treasures. Summer is a good time to "clean out" things that you no longer use. We will take almost anything, except clothing and shoes. All proceeds will benefit the Historical Society and receipts will be available upon request. Our yard sale will include a boutique booth for more valuable items, so keep that in mind when you talk to your friends.

Mention to people holding local yard sales that the Society would be happy to pick up their left-overs. You may drop off saleable items at the fire house on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. during the month of June. The office will be closed in July and August, but please call and leave a message and we will get back to you within 24 hours. Also, if you need a pick-up, call 346-6588 and let us know.

Notes of Interest

* We have been contacted by members who are interested in making a donation to the Boyd Deep Canyon Desert Research Center which was featured in the Spring issue of the Hourglass. You may write a check to:

  Regents, University of California – Riverside
  3401 Watkins Drive
  Riverside, CA 92521

  Stipulate on the check and in a note that you would like the money to be used for the Boyd Desert Center.

* The Winter issue of the Hourglass carried an article about deceased member, Jean Krauss, regarding her and her husband, Robert, having a printing business in the Desert Magazine building. Some of our members and research in the archives and old telephone books proved this to be true. A Desert Sun article dated 4-5-75 reads:

  "Recently Desert Printers moved from next door to a building in Indio. At this time Desert Southwest Art Gallery is in its 28th season. An expansion of the gallery's book and print section is planned."

* Board of Directors meeting has been scheduled for June 9 at 9:00 a.m. at the historical fire house.

Have a great summer !! Editors: Ginny Folkers, Brett Romer & Jim Young

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